

DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?

John 20:1-18 NLT

Early on Sunday morning,^[a] while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance.² She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, “They have taken the Lord’s body out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”³ Peter and the other disciple started out for the tomb.⁴ They were both running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.⁵ He stooped and looked in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he didn’t go in.⁶ Then Simon Peter arrived and went inside. He also noticed the linen wrappings lying there,⁷ while the cloth that had covered Jesus’ head was folded up and lying apart from the other wrappings.⁸ Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in, and he saw and believed—⁹ for until then they still hadn’t understood the Scriptures that said Jesus must rise from the dead.¹⁰ Then they went home.¹¹ Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in.¹² She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying.¹³ “Dear woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked her. “Because they have taken away my Lord,” she replied, “and I don’t know where they have put him.”¹⁴ She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn’t recognize him.¹⁵ “Dear woman, why are you crying?” Jesus asked her. “Who are you looking for?” She thought he was the gardener. “Sir,” she said, “if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him.”¹⁶ “Mary!” Jesus said. She turned to him and cried out, “Rabboni!” (which is Hebrew for “Teacher”).¹⁷ “Don’t cling to me,” Jesus said, “for I haven’t yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”¹⁸ Mary Magdalene found the disciples and told them, “I have seen the Lord!” Then she gave them his message.

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The Big Q: How do I know Jesus really rose from the dead?

For most people, someone returning from the dead is confined to special effects and movies, and couldn't really happen in 'real' life. However, since our entire faith rests on the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, we firmly believe that resurrection is not only possible, but actually happened just over 2000 years ago just outside Jerusalem. We are going to talk about the facts behind our faith in the resurrection, so you can feel confident about what most people doubt. First, let me share a story from my friend Greg's life about a 'resurrection' from the dead of sorts.

"My uncle Bob, at 6 foot 3 and 250 pounds, has always been a big, strapping, strong man. ...he was a cigar-chomping, wild-eyed street fighter who actually got paid to bust skulls. He was a bouncer in the heart of Denver, CO... One night Bob was at the bar when he heard there was a fight out in the parking lot. He ran outside only to find his best friend, D.J., bleeding from five stab wounds. He found the culprit hiding on the outside of the building.

Bob ran up to the guy, smashed his head into the brick wall, and began pummeling him with his fists and kicking him with his feet, and continued to beat him in a blind fury of rage...but by this time Bob was kicking a corpse. This thug's heart had stopped.

The police arrested Uncle Bob, and it was at this point, as he was looking out the window and seeing the paramedics trying to pump this guy's heart to start beating again, that Bob snapped out of his rage and back into reality.

He had literally just beaten a guy to death. In sheer desperation Bob began to cry out to God, "If You allow that man to be resuscitated, I will give my life completely to You and serve You with all of my heart!" ...[The man was resuscitated] and fully recovered. Uncle Bob, who had trusted in Jesus as a kid, got back on the narrow path that night.¹

While most people might believe this story about Bob and the man being resuscitated after just a few minutes, they find a story about resurrection after 3 days much more difficult to grasp. That's why it's so good that we

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have historical facts and resources that make an airtight case for Jesus coming back from the dead.

One of the common tactics skeptics use to deny the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ is to say that “since none of us were there, no one can really say what happened 2000 years ago”.

While there is some truth to that statement, it is an illogical argument against something having been documented in history.

Here’s why. None of us were also around when George Washington was President, so technically, we can’t “prove” He was President, however, if there is enough historical documentation attesting to his Presidency and corroborated historically by enough eyewitnesses, combined with absolutely no documented claims denying these facts, logic demands we accept his Presidency as historically true. To deny this would be illogical and unscientific.

The same holds true for the resurrection of Jesus. Skeptics, of course, have a tendency to discount the Biblical accounts because the Bible is “just a religious book”, but that is not true.

In addition to the Word of God, the Bible also happens to be a book of history, documenting by eyewitnesses the actual events of that time in history.

History records from eyewitnesses that Jesus Christ actually died and then 3 days later rose from the dead and was seen by 500 men over a span of 40 days.

But, skeptics will still refuse to accept this by coming up with hypothetical theories to explain away the resurrection.

Let’s look at the historical record from the most reliable source on the planet-the Bible.

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter; and then to the Twelve. After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen

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asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. (1 Corinthians 15:3-6, 14, 17-19) NIV

These verses are the words of the Apostle Paul, and they are written to answer the critics at the church in Corinth who were just like the people we've been talking about-the ones who don't believe that resurrection from the dead is possible. Did you notice the line; After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living...

So Paul answers them with some incredibly powerful facts. Let's take a look at some.

Fact one: Scripture predicted it, Christ fulfilled it, and people saw it. The critics of the resurrection wanted to have their cake and eat it too when it came to claiming trust in the Bible but not in the resurrection story.

But Paul makes it clear that it doesn't work that way. The Bible-specifically the Old Testament-made specific and clear predictions and prophecies about Jesus coming back from the dead. So if He didn't then the Bible is full of mistakes and lies.

We know from historians not just the Bible. We know Jesus died because when the centurion pierced His side, blood and water came pouring out. That only happens to a dead body. Yet, there was no Body to be found.

Ya know what? Let's do this in kind-a question-and-answer rapid fire style. Try to keep up!

How could the disciples even steal the body in the first place?

The body was encased in a tomb with a 24 hour watch by Roman guards trained to kill. The punishment for breaking a Roman grave seal, or attempting to steal a body or overpowering a Roman soldier was death, so how did timid, cowardly disciples muster up the courage to try this, for what motive? That's a big risk for absolutely no payoff. Some will say "maybe the guard was asleep". First, dereliction of duty brought death to a Roman soldier, so I doubt they would "fall asleep" and secondly, the stone covering the tomb weighed 2 tons and was rolled into a stone groove which would have been flush against the stone opening of the grave.

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There was also a Roman seal. To break that meant the death penalty to the one who did it.

One of the most common outrageous claims is that the disciples merely stole the body of Jesus and hid it, then lied to people telling them He really rose from the dead.

Think about how loud a 2 ton stone scraping against stone would be as several disciples tried to move it. I don't think Rip Van Winkle could sleep through that, so, how could the disciples have stolen the body?

Answer, they didn't. Jesus actually rose from the dead.

What event changed them from cowards to courageous?

If Jesus did not actually rise from the dead, why did the disciples go from frightened, timid followers of Jesus before His death, to bold evangelists willing to die preaching His resurrection if they just really made the whole thing up and He was still dead? Remember, before Jesus was crucified, the disciples were, for the most part, cowards. Peter denied even knowing Jesus 3 times before the crucifixion.

Why were the disciples willing to be tortured and killed for a known lie? You don't need a degree in human psychology to know that people do not die for a cause they know to be false. People do certainly die for false beliefs all the time, but they think they are dying for the truth. If the disciples faked the resurrection, they would know Christianity is a lie. History records they were tortured and killed for their faith, and not one of them said, under torture "okay, okay, we made the whole thing up"?

Why would they make up the resurrection story if Jesus turned out to be a fraud? Remember, Jesus told them He would rise after 3 days.

If He was still dead on day four, that means He wasn't who He claimed He was, He wasn't the Messiah and certainly wasn't God after all, so why would the disciples worship a dead guy who lied to them and was exposed as a fraud?

Answer: They must have actually seen the risen Jesus.

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What was their motive? Lies or deceptions are typically done for some selfish motive. Preaching the resurrection of Jesus would not bring them wealth, fame, status or popularity. It would only cause them to be hated, scorned, persecuted, excommunicated, imprisoned, exiled, beheaded, tortured and crucified, as history records, so again, what could possibly be their motive? Just to save face? That's certainly not logical. No one is going to go through what the disciples went through just because they're too embarrassed to say "I guess we were wrong", so what was their motive?

Answer: It was the TRUTH. They must have actually seen the risen Jesus.

How do the disciples, 12 ordinary people pull off such a hoax? Remember, this "hoax" would trigger thousands of skeptics per day to convert to following their scam as well as redirect the entire world to even eventually change their calendars and establish their hoax character, Jesus as the best known religious figure in all of humanity. How could they pull something like this off without ever getting exposed, offering a death bed confession or even admitting it was a hoax under torture?

Answer: It must not be a hoax. They must have actually seen the risen Jesus.

Why would thousands of people immediately convert if Jesus didn't actually rise from the dead? Think about it.

History records that thousands upon thousands were instantly and immediately mass converting to be followers of Jesus, as many as 3,000 in a day. It is recorded that after the crucifixion, Jesus appeared alive over a span of 40 days and to "500 brethren". (Back then, only men were counted in crowd totals, so factoring in women and children, Jesus most likely appeared to safely 1,500 to 2,000 people over 40 days). If that many people saw Jesus alive, it would explain how so many were converting because even the most hardened skeptics would have crowds and crowds of former skeptics saying "yes, it's true, we all have seen Him too", but if no one saw Him alive and the crowds had only the words of the disciples to go by, why would thousands convert? Remember, the disciples were preaching to many who didn't want to believe Jesus was the Messiah, so what words could they speak to hostile crowds to convince them Jesus really did rise from the dead? "Trust us"? That might convince some of the disciple's closest friends, but not thousands upon thousands of skeptics. So why did thousands convert?

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Answer: Crowds must have actually seen the risen Jesus.

How did Saul of Tarsus, the chief persecutor of Christians convert to become the Apostle Paul, the chief follower of Jesus if He didn't really have an encounter with a risen Jesus?

Logically, if Jesus didn't really rise from the dead, Saul would just gloat in his victory, exposing Jesus as a fraud who couldn't conquer death after all, so what event could have caused him to convert?

Answer: He must have actually encountered the risen Jesus as recorded.

That was fun, wasn't it. Let's look at just a few more.

The first to discover the empty tomb were women. I'm sorry ladies but back in the 1st century women as eyewitnesses, come on give me a break. If the accounts had been made up, no ancient author would have used women for witnesses.

The disciples make themselves look bad in the Gospels? Think about it, if you were going to make up a story, wouldn't you present yourself in somewhat of a positive light? The disciples painted themselves as sniveling cowards lacking in faith.

So if He didn't come back, the Bible is wrong, and over 500 people-including all the disciples-were all willing to risk their lives and lie about the resurrected Jesus.

Another argument shows the horrible consequences in this life and the life to come if Jesus didn't rise from the dead.

Without the resurrection, our faith is useless, and our future is bleak. Paul says that if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, your faith is useless, and your future is either a permanent grave or a permanent place in hell. The word for useless basically means empty and meaningless. So what He is arguing is that without the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, our faith in Him for salvation is useless and empty. In other words, we're all either going to hell or death is final.

More questions now come up though don't they?

What is the connection between Christ's resurrection and our resurrection?

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How does the resurrection give us hope for the future?

What good is someone's trust in Christ if He is still in the grave?

As hard as it seems to imagine someone coming back from the grave after three days, in this case it's even harder to imagine how Jesus could have stayed in the grave.

The historical proof, changed lives, and consequences in life if He did, should give us the confidence each day that our faith is as solid as it could get, and one day we get to be with Jesus in heaven.

The other thing to remember is that **the power of the resurrection gives us the power to defeat sin in our lives.** So the next time you feel powerless to defeat the evil in your life, call on the power that overcame not only evil, but death itself!

Can I get an AMEN!?

ⁱ Greg Stier, *You're Next*, pg. 75-77